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Weaving Italian Experience into the British Immigration Narrative

Dr Wendy Ugolini

Colin Holmes's pioneering work encouraged the emergence of a substantial historiography which testifies to historical traditions of intolerance towards different immigrant communities in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, traditionally, there has been a tendency within British Italian texts dedicated to recovering the histories of the Italian presence in the United Kingdom to portray the Italians as somehow immune from the difficulties faced by other ethnic minority groups. For example, one of the leading commentators, Terri Colpi, once defined the Italian community as being 'in an unique and aristocratic position amongst the immigrant populations of this country' whilst Umberto Marin, writing in 1975, described the Italians in Britain as 'a privileged collectivity' which represented 'a kind of Eden within the troubled emigration front.'¹ Furthermore, academic and popular representations have often converged to present a largely celebratory – and at times almost saccharine - overview of the Italian presence in Britain which arguably serves to obscure historical incidences of racism and hostility. This is typified in an example from a local Scottish newspaper which asserts, 'They bought us restaurants, ice cream sold from street vending vans...“They” are the Italians whose humour is as rich as their wine and whose charm is as warm as the sun in any vineyard. They are a gregarious race, who, since arriving in Scotland, have become as closely entwined with Scots society as spaghetti lengths in a bowl.'² I have tried to

¹ Terri Colpi, 'Italian migration to Scotland: settlement, employment and the key role of the padrone.' Paper given at the *Race, Curriculum and Employment Conference*, University of Glasgow 8 March 1986, 1; Umberto Marin, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna* (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione 1975), 104 (translation by Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg 2000), 39).

² Frank Hurley, 'The incomers. They gave us the ice cream vendors', *Edinburgh Evening News* 3 February 1973, 87-8. See Wendy Ugolini, '"Spaghetti Lengths in a Bowl"? Recovering Narratives of Not "Belonging" amongst the Italian Scots', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 31, no.2, 2013, 214-34.

interrogate and challenge this rather cosy reciprocity in my own work, published from 1998 onwards and, more recently, historians working in Wales such as Marco Giudici, have further attempted to complicate the notion of a 'tolerant' response to the Italian presence within the constituent nations of Britain.³ This chapter will track the evolution of the historiography of British Italian migrant experience, acknowledging the groundbreaking contributions of scholars such as Terri Colpi and Lucio Sponza whilst also mapping more recent works which focus on questions of war, identities and memory.

The Italians are considered a long-established migrant group, having starting to arrive in Britain in significant numbers in the mid-nineteenth century. The 1871 census records an Italian population of just over 5,000 present in Britain. By 1911, this figure stood at 25, 365 with around one fifth in Scotland.⁴ As Sponza notes, a unique feature which distinguished Italian settlement in Britain was the concentration in the catering professions which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and enabled Italian families to remain largely self-employed.⁵ However, their sense of belonging within the wider British community was substantially eroded during the Second World War – and the fragility of their status clearly underlined - when Italy declared war on Britain in June 1940 and Italian nationals were categorized as 'enemy aliens', leading to state-sponsored policies of internment, deportation

³ Wendy Ugolini, 'Re-inforcing Otherness? Edinburgh's Italian community and the impact of the Second World War', *Family & Community History*, vol.1, 1998, 57-69; Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other': Italian Scottish Experience in World War II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2011); Marco Giudici, 'Discourses of Identity in Post-Devolution Wales: The Case of Welsh-Italians', *Contemporary Wales*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2012, 228-47.

⁴ Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor* (Edinburgh: Mainstream 1991), 48.

⁵ Lucio Sponza, 'Italians in Great Britain' in Melvin Ember, Carol R Ember and Ian Skoggard (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World*, Vol. 2 (New York: Springer 2005), 874-83 (880). This has allowed some historians to argue that Italians have been largely protected from discrimination rooted in labour tensions. See Murdoch Rodgers, 'Italiani in Scozzia', in Billy Kay (ed.), *Odyssey. Voices from Scotland's Recent Past* (Edinburgh: Polygon 1982), 13-21 (15).

and relocation as well as outbreaks of anti-Italian violence in British cities and towns. For many decades the history of the Italian presence in Britain was relatively neglected, although there were some early and interesting exceptions such as a social anthropological study by Philip Garigue and Raymond Firth undertaken in 1956. This explored the experiences of ‘persons of Italian nationality...and persons of British nationality, born of parents or grandparents of Italian nationality living in London’, categorising this inter-generational cohort as ‘Italianates’ displaying kinship ties with relations in Italy.⁶ In the aftermath of the Second World War, they noted the ‘operation of discrimination’ against those living in London which, in turn, served to reinforce a strong sense of ‘Italianness’.⁷ The sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier notes how a focus in the early 1970s on white ethnic groups, so-called ‘invisible immigrants,’ stimulated fresh interest in the Italian community in Britain.⁸ An insightful study of Italians in London by Robin Palmer in 1977 followed Garigue and Firth in picking up on a ‘slow rate of assimilation’. Palmer also alluded to the ‘traumatic’ wartime history of the community in London and the ‘disastrous’ attachment within the diaspora to Italian Fascism in the interwar period.⁹ Another formative text to emerge at this time was Marin’s 1975 study, *Italiani in Gran Bretagna*, although the fact that it was produced in the Italian language arguably limited its wider circulation. Much of the early recovery work of Italian migrant experience in Britain was undertaken by geographers rather than historians.¹⁰ In 1979, there was an edition of the *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal* devoted to Italian immigration which was followed in 1993 by a supplement to the *italianist* recording ‘a

⁶ Philip Garigue and Raymond Firth, ‘Kinship Organisations of Italianates in London’, in Raymond Firth (ed.), *Two Studies of Kinship in London* (London: Athlone Press 1956), 67-93 (67)

⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁸ A term first coined in a 1972 statistical survey on Italians, Spanish and Portuguese immigrants by MacDonald & MacDonald. See Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 21.

⁹ Robin Palmer, ‘The Italians: Patterns of Migration to London’, in James Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures* (Oxford: Blackwell 1977), 242-268 (243; 266).

¹⁰ See Russell King, ‘Italian Migration to Great Britain’, *Geography*, vol. 62, no. 3, 1977, 176-86.

century of Italian emigration to Britain'.¹¹ In Scotland, the scholar Andrew Wilkin has been particularly assiduous in tracking the early origins of Italian settlers in Scotland¹² and Sandra Chistolini addressed post-war female experience in Scotland in her Italian-language study, *Donne italoscozzesi*.¹³ In the same year, an edited collection on Italian language and culture in Scotland was published.¹⁴ There was also an influential chapter by Murdoch Rodgers entitled 'Italiani in Scozzia [sic]' which drew upon a BBC Radio Scotland broadcast programme.¹⁵ The 1980s witnessed the emergence of a broad range of local studies, which helped to map the experiences of different communities across the United Kingdom, beginning with Bruno Bottignolo's study of Italian immigrants in south west England, *Without a Bell Tower*, in 1985.¹⁶ A number of autobiographies and memoirs have also been published, primarily reflecting two key constituencies: those who have achieved commercial success within the community or those who feel compelled to 'tell' the story of their wartime

¹¹ *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal* no. 29, 1979; Lucio Sponza and Arturo Tosi (eds), 'A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain 1880-1980s. Five Essays' Supplement to *the italianist*, vol.13, 1993.

¹² Andrew Wilkin, 'Origins and destinations of the early Italo-Scots', *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal*, no.29, 1979, 52-61; Andrew Wilkin, 'Defined origins of the earliest Italo-Scots' in Andrew Wilkin (ed.), *Mosaico. A miscellany of writings presented to Cav.Uff. Dr Enrico Cocozza* (Glasgow: Strathclyde University 1985); Andrew Wilkin, 'Further definition of the origins of the earliest Italo-Scots' in Eileen A Millar (ed.), *Renaissance and Other Studies* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow 1988), 348-59; Andrew Wilkin, 'Introducing the Italo-Scots', *Vector*, vol. 2, 1990, 15-23.

¹³ Sandra Chistolini, *Donne Italoscozzesi. Tradizione e cambiamento* (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione 1986).

¹⁴ Mario Dutto (ed.), *The Italians in Scotland: Their Language and Culture* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 1986).

¹⁵ Rodgers, 'Italiani in Scozzia'.

¹⁶ Bruno Bottignolo, *Without a Bell Tower* (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione 1985). See also David Green, 'Little Italy in Victorian London: Holborn's Italian community', *Camden History Review*, vol.15, 1988, 2-6; Anthony Rea, *Manchester's Little Italy* (Manchester: Neil Richardson 1988) and, more recently, Doreen Hopwood and Margaret Dilloway, *Bella Brum. A History of Birmingham's Italian Community* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council 1996); Giancarlo Rinaldi, *From the Serchio to the Solway* (Dumfries: Dumfries and Galloway Council 1998); Terry Cooke, *Little Italy: A History of Liverpool's Italian Community* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press 2002).

experiences.¹⁷ In 1991, Colin Hughes produced a detailed overview of the Italian community in South Wales with the typically evocative title, *Lime, Lemon and Sarsaparilla*. Whilst Hughes's book includes considered analysis, particularly when acknowledging the emergence of Italian Fascism within interwar diasporic communities, the general tone adopted is one of celebration, with Hughes making claims for the Italians as a long established, well 'integrated' migrant group.¹⁸ Fortier points out that the leading British Italian texts appeared at a time of wider public discourse on the general desirability (or not) of different immigrant groups.¹⁹ In participant observation fieldwork undertaken with the London Italian community at the close of the twentieth century, Fortier notes how, 'In a country and continent where "immigrant" means black and foreigner' there was a keenness within the present-day Italian community not to emphasize their marginal status as members of a minority group within British society.²⁰

One figure who has made a significant and pioneering contribution to British Italian historiography is Terri Colpi, a geographer, who published an extensive range of journal articles from 1979 onwards before finally producing her groundbreaking text, *The Italian*

¹⁷ Peppino Leoni, *I Shall Die on the Carpet* (London: Leslie Frewin 1966); Bruno Sereni, *They Took the Low Road* (Glasgow: Casa d'Italia 1974); Charles Forte, *Forte. The Autobiography of Charles Forte* (London: Pan Books 1997); Piero Tognini, *A Mind at War: an autobiography* (New York: Vantage Press 1990); Joe Pieri, *Isle of the Displaced* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson 1997); Joe Pieri, *Tales of the Savoy. Stories from a Glasgow café* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson 1999); Enrico Coccozza, *Assunta – The Story of Mrs Joe* (New York: Vantage Press 1987).

¹⁸ Colin Hughes, *Lime, Lemon and Sarsaparilla. The Italian Community in South Wales 1880-1945* (Bridgend: Seren Books 1991). In books addressing the Italian diaspora, there is often a tendency to adopt a rather nostalgic approach rooted in the cultural appeal of the ice cream seller or café owner. See, here, Hughes's comment: 'One of my earliest recollections is of learning to read the words on the wrappers and boxes in the window of an Italian shop in the village where I was born in South Wales'. Colin Hughes, 'The Italian Community in South Wales from 1880 to the Second World War' in Sponza and Tosi (eds), 'A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain 1880-1980s', 43-58.

¹⁹ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 38-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

Factor, in 1991 which was accompanied by a photographic collection, *Italians Forward*.²¹ Another leading figure is Lucio Sponza who produced a comprehensive scholarly work on Italian immigrants in nineteenth century Britain which he followed with *Divided Loyalties*, examining the experience of Italian internees and Italian Prisoners of War in Britain during the Second World War.²² Together, their published oeuvre constitutes an impressive contribution to British Italian historiography although both contain some flaws and omissions which will be discussed below. In light of the general paucity of material on the Italian presence in Britain, Colpi's book, in particular, became influential. However, an interesting intervention was made in 2000 by Fortier. In her book, *Migrant Belongings*, Fortier points out that although much of the literature on Italians in Britain 'depict a collectivity characterized by a high degree of diversity *within*', the very fact of producing 'written renditions of the Italian presence' means that 'some kind of coherence is created' from the disparate histories, social relations and social positions of Italian migrants and therefore constructions of a one-dimensional Italian 'community' emerge.²³ The very act of writing the history of the Italian presence in Britain, argues Fortier, means that ultimately these texts and publications '*produce* what they claim to be *re-presenting* and *re-covering*.'²⁴ Furthermore, she notes how most of the books are produced by Italians who have, in one way or another, a

²¹ Terri Colpi, 'The Italian community in Glasgow, with special reference to spatial development' *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal*, no. 29, 1979, 62-75; Terri Colpi, 'The Italian Migration to Scotland: Fact, Fiction and the Future', in Dutto (ed.), *Italians in Scotland*; Terri Colpi, 'The impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community', in David Cesarani and Tony Kushner (eds), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass 1993); Colpi, *Italian Factor*, Terri Colpi, *Italians Forward. A Visual History of the Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream 1991); Terri Colpi, 'The Scottish Italian Community: senza un campanile?', *The Innes Review*, XLIV, no. 2, 1993, 153-67.

²² Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press 1988); Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties. Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern: Peter Lang 2000).

²³ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

personal commitment to the British Italian ‘community’.²⁵ For example, Sponza is Italian and at the time of writing, a professor emeritus of Italian Studies at the University of Westminster whereas Colpi is a self-styled ‘third-generation Italian Scot’ who writes as ‘a proud member of the Community’.²⁶ Significantly, Colpi’s book, *The Italian Factor* was launched at the National Library of Scotland’s 1991 exhibition *The Italian Scots* legitimising Colpi’s status as an ‘authority’ on the community and in 1995 she received the title of *Cavaliere* from the Italian government for her contribution to the advancement of the community in Britain.²⁷ Yet, as Fortier points out, *The Italian Factor* stands out as a ‘highly normative’ representation where the Italian ‘Community’ ‘is given as a unified “thing”, the membership of which is policed by the degree of *conformity* to its cultural contents.’²⁸ Indeed, Colpi’s book ‘consistently objectifies and normalizes *what it means to be and act Italian*: from *campanilismo* to *compadrismo*, family loyalties and first communions.’²⁹ In the introduction to her 1991 book, Colpi admits that it ‘is not directly concerned with those who have opted or drifted out of the Community; it is concerned with those who have *an Italian way of life*’ but it is not entirely clear what this assertion means in the context of the late twentieth century when Italian families have been settled in Britain for many generations.³⁰

As a social and cultural historian, I am particularly interested in the ways in which Colpi narrates the impact of the Second World War on the Italian diasporic community. For example, it is striking that, in the chapter addressing the war Colpi states her intention to explain events ‘*from the Italian point of view*’ [my emphasis] which, again, seems to suggest

²⁵ Ibid., 40.

²⁶ Colpi, *Italian Factor*, 5.

²⁷ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 41.

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

²⁹ Ibid., 168.

³⁰ Colpi, *Italian Factor*, 16

a normative way of behaving to which ‘Italians’ should have conformed in wartime.³¹ Colpi writes that by 1939, the Italians in Britain were ‘well integrated, respected and often prosperous members of British society’, the war had a devastating impact but the community managed to successfully rebuild their businesses and relations with the local community in the post-war period.³² As Bill Williams identifies in his work with Jewish immigrants, communal myth often promotes the idea of a ‘socially coherent and harmonious’ community, an image which is absorbed over time by the immigrants themselves and later repeated by historians.³³ As I’ve stated in my own work, it has arguably been in the interest of those once most actively involved in the interwar Italian Fascist clubs, the more successful, commercially-based members of the Italian community to reconstruct the past to suit the needs of the present-day, where they, in Colpi’s own phrase, ‘trade on their ethnicity’.³⁴ In the post-war era, where the entrepreneurial members of the community have ‘often concentrated on selling some aspect of their Italianness’,³⁵ it has been important to construct narratives which emphasize the bonds of friendship and ignore the ‘tangled’ histories of the past.³⁶ In this interpretative context, the Italophobia of the Second World War becomes dismissed as a ‘one-off’ event, a regrettable disruption in a long history of cordial relations. This tendency to downplay anti-Italian hostility can be seen in the production of an article by Sponza on the anti-Italian riots of 1940 in Scotland in which he downplayed their ‘xenophobic’ dimension, alluding to the importance of the ‘depressed socio-economic

³¹ Ibid., 99.

³² Ibid., 101. Fortier defines this as an ‘entrepreneurial narrative’, adopting a narrowly capitalistic definition of success. Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 46

³³ Bill Williams, ‘The Jewish Immigrant in Manchester: The Contribution of Oral History’ *Oral History*, vol.7, no.1, 1979, 43-53 (43).

³⁴ Colpi, *Italian Factor*, 196. See Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 65.

³⁵ Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p.256.

³⁶ Angelo Principe, ‘A tangled knot: prelude to 10 June 1940’ in Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin and Angelo Principe (eds), *Enemies Within. Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2000), 27-51 (27).

conditions of the Scottish youth'.³⁷ This seems to deny the insight of David Cesarani on incidences of racial violence which warns against the temptation 'to localise these occurrences and thus foreclose an appreciation of how anti-alienism was a universal phenomenon' in Britain.³⁸ It can also be countered to some degree by own research on the riots which, drawing upon the oral testimonies of British Italians, highlights their profoundly unsettling racialized nature and the long-term psychological impact upon many of those who witnessed the violence at first hand.³⁹

The desire to 'gloss over' difficult issues such as racial violence, Fascist membership, and split allegiances, leads to partial or even misleading, accounts of British Italian experience.⁴⁰ Both Colpi and Sponza foreground the experience of male internees when discussing the impact of the war on the Italian community with the net result that a narrow stratum of experience becomes representative of the community as a whole and difference on the grounds of class, gender, or political allegiances is overlooked. In particular, this dominance of a singular elite narrative, focusing on internment, has silenced the memories of different groups within the community. Major aspects of British Italian experience – service in the British Armed Forces, life on the homefront for women and children, essentially the memories of *non-internees* - have been marginalized in the traditional historiography.

³⁷ Lucio Sponza, 'The anti-Italian riots, June 1940', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Leicester University Press 1996), 131-49 (146).

³⁸ David Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940', in Cesarani and Kushner (eds), *Internment of Aliens*, 25-52 (38).

³⁹ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 118-43.

⁴⁰ For a global perspective of this phenomenon see Franca Iacovetta and Roberto Perin, 'Introduction. Italians and Wartime Internment: Comparative Perspectives on Public Policy, Historical Memory, and Daily Life', in Iacovetta, Perin and Principe (eds), *Enemies Within*, 3-21.

A notable absence from the work of both Colpi and Sponza is the experiences of second generation Italians who enlisted in the British Armed Forces and auxiliary services. It would appear that the act of British-born Italians serving in the British forces, raising difficult questions of loyalties and allegiances, has resulted in them being excluded from historiographical representations of the community's past.⁴¹ In *The Italian Factor*, Colpi asserts that the generation of British-born Italians 'who served in the *fiercely anti-Italian* British Armed Forces' during the war were 'forced to throw off their heritage, shake themselves adrift of their roots and *pretend to be something they were not.*'[my italics]⁴² In sharp contrast, the actions of the far smaller group of 'British-born Italians' who were interned, usually because of their involvement in the *Fasci*, were commended for being 'determined to go with "the Italians" and to remain united with their roots and their Community.'⁴³ Thus, traditional historiography, by neglecting those who served in the British forces, makes an implicit judgement about their claim to being a 'good Italian' and itself draws upon wartime dichotomies when, as Colpi acknowledges, 'the community became deeply split into the so-called "good Italians" (the Fascists) and "bad Italians" (the others).'⁴⁴ This disavowal of British Italian military service runs counter to wider trends within immigration historiography which acknowledge how migrant communities often foreground military participation in wartime in order to lay claim to a sense of citizenship and national belonging in Britain.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 15.

⁴² Colpi, *Italian Factor*, 193.

⁴³ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁵ Wendy Ugolini, 'The embodiment of British Italian war memory? The curious marginalization of Dennis Donnini, VC', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 46, nos. 3-4, 2012, 397-415 (406-9).

My own research aimed to rebalance the picture by investigating the experiences of second generation Italians who served in the British Forces. Based on an analysis of the Second World War Roll of Honour, I calculated that over 7,000 men of Italian origin served in the British Army alone.⁴⁶ My book, *Experiencing War as the Enemy Other*, which incorporates the recorded oral testimonies of British Italians, attempted to foreground the lived experiences of those who served in the British armed forces and auxiliary services. This research illuminated the extent to which the accommodation of British-born Italians within the UK military structure encouraged the formulation of a distinctive dual-identity, which rested on identification with both Britain and Italy. Amongst second generation Italians who lived through the war, there is a strong sense of hybridity, of belonging to two cultures at once, highlighting the plurality of the Italian diaspora space in Britain. However, due to some anti-Italian discrimination faced in the British forces, it could also be argued that second generation veterans often emerged with a strong sense of ‘otherness’.⁴⁷

Experiencing War also addressed memorialisation of the war with the British Italian community, noting the emergence of ‘narratives of victimhood’ surrounding the sinking of the deportation ship the *Arandora Star*, by a German U-Boat in July 1940 when around 446 Italian internees were drowned.⁴⁸ In Fortier’s view, ‘the British Italian community still defines itself by the grief over the lives lost in the *Arandora Star*.’⁴⁹ Those on board the ship had been categorized as the ‘most dangerous’ of the internees in the sense that they had been members of Italian Fascist clubs in Britain. However, unlike with German and Austrian refugees, there had been no attempts to ‘screen’ or classify members of the Italian community

⁴⁶ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 144.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 194-5. See also Wendy Ugolini, "'The Sins of the Fathers': The Contested Recruitment of Second-Generation Italians in the British Forces 1936–43' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2013, 376-97.

⁴⁸ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 224.

⁴⁹ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 57.

via tribunals, leading to an over-reliance on the racialized views of the security authorities. In recent years there has been a burgeoning of interest in this event, underlined by a range of commemorative activities, including the production of populist histories and fictional novels.⁵⁰ However, I have argued that the constant emphasis on the tragedy within communal discourse, drawing upon the symbolism of victimhood and suffering, functions to distract attention away from political, class and generational differences in the inter-war period and, in particular, the fact that a small but significant minority of the Italian diasporic elite embraced Fascism.⁵¹ My book traces how, after a relative silence of seven decades, organized elements within Italian communities from across Britain started to claim their own sites of memory to commemorate the disaster with the parallel development of campaigns for an apology or compensation for wartime Italian internment.⁵²

In recent years there has been a burgeoning of more critical work on Italian experience in Britain which acknowledges complexity. Claudia Baldoli's work, *Exporting Fascism*, made a refreshing addition to the historiography by mapping the process through which Mussolini's Italy attempted 'to transform its emigrants in Britain into enthusiastic Fascists'.⁵³ This countered historiographical trends which tended to downplay the political dimensions of Italian Fascism in Britain in the interwar period. Tony Kushner provides a fresh analysis of the anti-Italian riots in *We Europeans?* which, by making use of contemporaneous Mass

⁵⁰ Pietro Zorza, *Arandora Star* (Glasgow: Italiani in Scozia 1985); Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *The Star of Shame – the Arandora Star* (Madison Publishing 1989); Maria Serena Balestracci, *Arandora Star. From Oblivion to Memory* (Parma: Monte Università 2008). The Arandora Star retains its magnetic hold on popular imagination. See Natalie Dye, *Arandora Star* (London: Peach Publishing, 2014). The experience of Italian Prisoners of War is another heavily romanticized aspect of British Italian experience. See Philip Paris, *Orkney's Italian Chapel: The True Story of an Icon* (Edinburgh: Black & White Publishing 2013).

⁵¹ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 233.

⁵² For more on this, see Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 223-50.

⁵³ Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism. Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 1.

Observation diaries, uncovers evidence of ‘bonding with the British Italians’ and suggests that local knowledge often gave ‘a sophisticated insight into the dynamics of ordinary Italians in Britain and the ambiguities and tensions caused by the pull of family, politics and patriotisms in creating a place called home’.⁵⁴ There has also been interesting work by Deianira Ganga on the ‘new’ post-war Italian community in England, focusing on those who settled in Nottingham and addressing transnational ties in the modern era. Ganga explores the numerous motivations lying behind the choice of older Italians to remain in the United Kingdom and effectively highlights the ‘portability’ of present-day identity, with many older Italians commuting regularly between Italy and England.⁵⁵ As noted above, there is also a body of research emerging from Wales, most notably the work of Bruna Chezzi and Marco Giudici. Both have produced thoughtful work addressing memorialisation as well as wider reflections on the place of Italians within Britain. In his study of museums and memorials in post-devolution Wales, for example, Giudici notes that the Italians have been portrayed as being a successful ‘model minority’. Being an allegedly integrated, successful and ‘popular’ migrant group, he argues, the Italians have offered an ideal narrative to reach out to other migrants and encourage them to get civically engaged in Welsh society. He shows how devolved nations such as Wales make use of their immigrant past to construct a tolerant and inclusive image of themselves that suits their current political aims.⁵⁶ This idea of demonstrating a ‘unique tolerance’ toward minority groups is also present within the Scottish Government which actively engages with the Italian diasporic community, lending its own

⁵⁴ Tony Kushner, *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, ‘Race’, and British Identity in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2004), 181-2.

⁵⁵ Deianira Ganga, ‘Reinventing the Myth of Return: Older **Italians** in Nottingham’ in Kathy Burrell and Panikos Panayi (eds), *Histories and Memories. Migrants and Their History in Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies 2006), 114-30 (127).

⁵⁶ Marco Giudici, ‘Immigrant narratives and nation-building in a stateless nation: the case of Italians in post-devolution Wales’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 37, no. 8, 2014, 1409-26; Marco Giudici, ‘Migration history and nation-building: the role of museums and memorials in post-devolution Wales’ in Lawrence Gourievidis (ed.), *Museums and Migration History: History, Memory and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge 2014), 216-26.

‘institutional aura’ to campaigns such as that for an Arandora Star memorial in Glasgow.⁵⁷ Chezzi provides an analysis of the recent campaign for an Arandora Star memorial in Wales, arguing that recent memorialisation within the United Kingdom reflects ‘an attempt to create a platform for the generation of memories after nearly seven decades of silence’.⁵⁸ It is worth noting however that Chezzi, an Italian scholar, was actively involved in the campaign itself and states in her article, ‘I strongly sympathised with my Welsh-Italians friends who had lost family members on the ill-fated ship, and I wanted to help raise awareness of those events and their significance for posterity.’⁵⁹ Here, Chezzi is adopting what Pamela Ballinger terms the ‘solidarity-rapport model’ of ethnography.⁶⁰ However, as Fortier has acknowledged, there are inherent challenges within critical scholarship if academics position themselves as advocates for the ‘cause’ of the migrant group which they are studying.⁶¹

Conclusion

The distress Italian families experienced during the wartime period, as well as the fact that they have been settled in Britain for over a hundred and fifty years has produced what Fortier characterizes as ‘a distinctly Italian form of belonging *in Britain*’.⁶² I have suggested elsewhere that it was perhaps only in the closing decades of the twentieth century, with domestic hostility focusing on more ‘visible’ immigrant groups and with Italian popular

⁵⁷ Giudici, ‘Migration History’, 217; ‘New Memorial Plan for WWII Tragedy’ *Scotsman* 28 May 2008.

⁵⁸ Bruna Chezzi, ‘Wales Breaks its Silence: from Memory to Memorial and beyond. The Italians in Wales during the Second World War’, *Italian Studies*, vol. 69, no.3, 2014, 376-93 (376).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 378. See also Bruna Chezzi, *Italians in Wales and their cultural representations, 1920s-2010s* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

⁶⁰ Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile. Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003), 271.

⁶¹ Fortier, *Migrant Belongings*, 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 164-5.

culture widely celebrated, that Italian identity in Britain could be more safely articulated.⁶³

Writing in 1991 Colin Holmes warned that, ‘Hostility towards immigrant groups “sleeps lightly”’.⁶⁴ Whilst there is an understandable tendency – particularly evident within devolved governments - to promote inclusivity and to celebrate the successful integration of the Italian community in Britain, there is also the danger that if we fail to address the more negative aspects of British Italian experience, then we will continue to feign surprise at the readiness of British society to target the internal ‘other’ at times of adversity.

⁶³ Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, 12-13.

⁶⁴ Colin Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, (London: Faber & Faber 1991), 95.